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ABSTRACT

Many of the characteristics typically associated with an occupation that is considered a profession are not commonly associated with teaching. These characteristics include: a clearly defined, codified, and accessible knowledge base; a structured, coherent induction experience monitored by oustanding practitioners; control of training, certification, and licensing of new entrants; and self-governance and self-policing authority. Making teaching a profession, professionalizing teaching, is seen by supporters of this effort to be a key component in improving teaching and learning in American schools. However, because of the nature of teaching and the context in which it is performed, there is disagreement about whether professionalization of teaching is the best way to improve teaching and the condition of teachers. The professional development school might contribute to professionalizing teaching by providing practical experience for beginning teachers, inspiring public confidence in teacher preparation, and providing a setting in which many of the features associated with traditional professions, but missing from teaching, can be developed, tested, refined, and disseminated. (IAH)

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ERIC DIGEST

PROFESSIONALIZING TEACHING: IS THERE A ROLE FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS?

by

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Professionalizing Teaching: Is There a Role for Professional Development Schools?

Ismat Abdal-Haqq

Since at least the mid-1970s, a number of proposals for improving American public education have included a call for professionalizing teaching, elevating teaching to the status of a "true" profession (Burbules & Densmore, 1991; Howsam, Corrigan, & Denemark, 1985; Soder, 1991). In 1976 the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education bicentennial report predicted that teaching "can and will self-actualize into a profession" and urged "professional and organizational effort" in that direction (Howsam, et al., 1985, 39). Indeed, in *Tomorrow's Teachers* the Holmes Group identified its goal as "nothing less than the transformation of teaching from an occupation into a genuine profession" (1986, ix). Such language implies two things: first, that teaching is not a profession; and second, that there is something desirable, both for teachers and for the public welfare, in making teaching a profession.

This digest focuses on three aspects of the issue of professionalizing teaching. First, what defines a profession? Second, how does teaching fall short of being a true profession? Finally, what contribution can professional development schools (PDSs) make to teacher professionalization?

What Is a Profession?

Pratte & Rury (1991) succinctly list four criteria that shape the traditional view of a profession: remuneration, social status, autonomous or authoritative power, and service. Burbules and Densmore (1991) label the typical reform approach to teacher professionalization the "taxonomic approach," which focuses on a list of characteristics that are typical of occupations that have been traditionally regarded as professions, especially law and medicine. These characteristics include: professional autonomy; a clearly defined, highly developed, specialized, and theoretical knowledge base; control of training, certification, and licensing of new entrants; self-governing and self-policing authority, especially with regard to professional ethics; and a commitment to public service (Burbules & Densmore, 1991; Case, Lanier, & Miskel, 1986; Haberman, 1991; Pratte & Rury, 1991). Case et al. (1986) include the presence of a collegium among the essential characteristics of a modern profession. Sockett (1990) makes a distinction between professionalization, which focuses on the process by which an occupation becomes a profession, and professionalism, which describes the quality of practice.

Is Teaching a Profession?

When teaching is examined through the lens of traditional perceptions of what constitutes a profession, certain critical criteria are missing. First, teaching is generally considered to lack a clearly defined, codified, accessible knowledge base. Goodlad (1990a) maintains that while there is a "potentially relevant and powerful" knowledge base for teaching, it has not been codified and rendered useful, and it is generally inaccessible to practitioners.

Case et al. (1986) contend that the major characteristic of a profession that is missing from teaching is the presence of a collegium. A sufficient degree of autonomy and self-governance are also missing (Goodlad, 1990b; Levine, 1988). Levine argues that for teaching to become a self-governing profession it must have a "structured induction experience conducted under the supervision of outstanding practitioners who can and will attest to the competence of new inductees to practice" (1988, 2). Both Levine (1988) and Darling-Hammond (1987) view as a critical element in teacher professionalism the existence of agreed upon standards of professional practice shaped by practitioners. Ruth Danis (personal communication, May 19, 1992), project director of the Rochester (NY) City School District's PDS program, notes that, "Schools are both public and professional institutions and that the larger values of society and the community come into play more consistently in education than in other professions. Teaching is not strictly a technical/rational, skill-driven task. The context of teaching is closer in texture to parenting than to debating in a courtroom or overseeing surgery in an operating room."

The nature of teaching, the context in which it is performed, and the process by which occupations traditionally have become professions make it impractical and undesirable to use traditional models of professionalization for teaching (Burbles & Densmore, 1991; Fenstermacher, 1991; Pratte & Rury, 1991; Soder, 1990; Tom, 1986). In summary, regardless of whether one agrees that professionalization is the best path to take to improve the condition of teachers and teaching, it is evident that several of the key features associated with professions are missing from teaching.

Do Professional Development Schools Have a Role in Professionalizing Teaching?

A professional development school is a functioning, exemplary, public school (Holmes, 1986) which has three major functions: student achievement, teacher induction, and improvement of practice. Schools which share this mission are also known as professional practice schools (Levine, 1988) and clinical schools (Meade, 1991). These schools are collaborations between school districts, colleges, and often, teachers unions; sites where practitioners, researchers, and clinical faculty work together to expand the knowledge base of the profession and prepare future practitioners (*The Professional Development School*, 1991).

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Many of those who believe that PDSs are a potentially significant element in professionalizing teaching generally support, at least in part, the medical model of professionalization and professionalism. Wise maintains that PDSs can provide an "organized introductory period of supervised teaching" (1989, 31), which would provide practical experience for beginning teachers in much the same way as teaching hospitals provide it for beginning physicians.

PDSs can help to promote teacher professionalism and teacher professionalization by providing a setting in which many of the features associated with traditional professions, but missing from teaching, can be developed, tested, and refined, and from which they can eventually be disseminated. Ultimately, the major contribution of PDSs to the professionalization of teaching may come from public confidence that the interns who leave PDSs have been rigorously prepared and confidence that the practices that have been validated by the PDSs have been rigourously tested. This confidence provides the foundation for public respect and recognition which, as Goodlad (1990b) states, are necessary conditions for establishing a profession.

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